AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Claims 1-23 (Canceled).

24. (New) A method of operating a computer system in order to retrieve information from two or more heterogeneous distributed databases of different formats, said computer system including a policy store storing one or more policies, said method comprising:

providing a user interface to said policy store enabling user configuration of said policy store with one or more policies;

each policy declaring one or more software modules required for processing a query;

wherein each software module is operable to interact with one of said heterogeneous databases in order to retrieve said information;

receiving a query detailing information derivable from two or more of said databases;

responsive to receipt of said query:

a) searching in the policy store for one or more policies associated with said query and

b) running the software modules declared in the one or more policies in order to retrieve said information from the two or more of said plurality of databases.

1535688

25.   (New) A method according to claim 24, wherein the policy declares the name and the location of the software module.

26.   (New) A method according to claim 24, wherein the policy declares the software module itself.

27.   (New) A method according to claim 24 further comprising the step of running a default software module to interact with one or more of said heterogeneous distributed databases if no policy associating a software module with said received query is found.

28.   (New) A method according to claim 24, wherein providing said user interface to said policy store comprises storing a policy associating a predetermined query with a software module executable to interact with said policy store to introduce a further policy contained within said query into said policy store.

29.   (New) A method according to claim 28 wherein said further policy replaces an existing policy.

30.   (New) A method according to claim 24 wherein said policies are expressed in the form of text.

1535688

31.　(New) A method according to claim 30 wherein said policies are preparable using a text editor.

32.　(New) A method according to claim 24 wherein said policies are indicative of a time after which said policies should no longer be applied.

33.　(New) A method according to claim 24 wherein each one of said plurality of databases has a different data handler.

34.　(New) A method according to claim 24 wherein said policy store user interface is restricted to a certain class of user.

35.　(New) A method according to claim 24 wherein the heterogeneous distributed database user interface is available to a different set of users from those able to modify said policies in said policy store.

36.　(New) A method according to claim 24 wherein said computer system comprises a plurality of computers in communication with one another, the software modules being run on a different computer to the one that receives said query.

37.　(New) A method according to claim 24 wherein said computer system comprises a plurality of computers in communication with one another, the policy store being on a different computer to the one that receives said query.

1535688

38.   (New) A computer system operable to provide a user interface to a heterogeneous distributed database including a plurality of databases of a different format in order to retrieve information from two or more of said databases, said computer system comprising:

a heterogeneous distributed database;

a policy store;

a user interface to said policy store operable to enable a user to configure said policy store with one or more policies, wherein each policy declares one or more software modules required for processing a query and wherein each software module is operable to interact with one of said heterogeneous distributed databases in order to retrieve said information;

query receiving means arranged in operation to receive a query detailing information derivable from two or more of said databases;

policy store searching means operable to search said policy store for a policy associating said query with one or more software modules; and

software module running means operable to run the software modules declared in the policy in order to retrieve said information from the two or more of said plurality of databases.

39.   (New) A digital data carrier carrying a program of instructions executable by processing apparatus to perform the method steps as set out in claim 24.

1535688

40.　(New)　A method of operating a computer system to provide a user interface to a heterogeneous distributed database including a plurality of databases of a different format in order to retrieve information from two or more of said databases, said computer system including a policy store storing one or more policies, each policy declaring one or more software modules required for processing a query , said method comprising:

providing a user interface to said policy store enabling the modification of said policies in said policy store;

receiving a query detailing information derivable from two or more of said databases;

responsive to the receipt of said query:

a) finding a policy in said policy store associating one or more software modules with the query; and

b) running the one or more software modules declared in the policy in order to retrieve said information from the two or more of said plurality of databases.

41.　(New)　A method according to claim 40 further comprising storing one or more policies in said policy store.

42.　(New)　A computer system for providing a user interface to a heterogeneous distributed database including a plurality of databases of a different

format in order to retrieve information from two or more of said databases, said

computer system comprising:

a heterogeneous distributed database;

storing means arranged in operation to store one or more policies, each policy

declaring one or more software modules required for processing a query;

means arranged in operation to provide a user interface to said policy store

enabling the modification of said policies in said policy store;

receiving means arranged in operation to receive a query detailing information

derivable from two or more of said databases;

finding means arranged in operation to find a policy in said policy store

associating one or more software modules with the query; and

running means arranged in operation to run said one or more software modules

in order to retrieve said information from the two or more of said plurality of database.